

Classical Greek and Latin

These subject guidelines should be read in conjunction with the “Introduction”, “Outline” and “Details—all essays” sections of this guide.

Overview

An extended essay in classical Greek or Latin provides students with an opportunity to investigate in depth non-trivial controversies of particular personal interest in the context of the ancient Greek or Roman worlds.

Choice of topic

The chosen topic will normally focus on a non-trivial aspect of the language, literature or civilization of the ancient Greek or Roman world, where scholarly opinion is divided.

Students may choose to focus either on linguistic features of classical Greek or Latin, or to investigate some aspect of classical Greek or Latin literature, or of classical Greek or Roman culture. Usually, however, since the language, literature and civilization are closely interwoven, it is appropriate to study the language in the context of the literature and civilization, and literature and civilization as presented through the classical Greek or Latin languages.

A topic should be rejected if it is interdisciplinary in nature, and/or not directly related to classical languages, literature or civilization, or is too broad to be covered effectively within the word limit.

The following examples of titles for classical languages extended essays are intended as guidance only. The pairings illustrate that controversial topics (indicated by the first title) should be encouraged rather than non-controversial ones (indicated by the second title).

- “The opening of Thucydides’ history is (or is not) a valid model for subsequent historians to aspire to” **is better than** “The purpose of Thucydides’ history is revealed by its opening”.
- “Does the Melian debate, as presented by Thucydides, reveal the true nature of Athenian democracy, or does he present it as an atypical aberration?” **is better than** “How does Thucydides present the Melian episode?”.
- “Catullus’ poetry is (or is not) autobiographical” **is better than** “Catullus’ love poetry”.
- “Cicero was (or was not) justified in executing Catiline” **is better than** “The Catilinarian conspiracy”.
- “Does the end of the *Aeneid* reveal that Virgil had lost any belief in the Augustan system he may have had, or does such a view ignore important truths about the Roman world?” **is better than** “What is the importance of the last scene of the *Aeneid*?”.

Treatment of the topic

The topic will normally be investigated by particular reference to appropriate texts and commentaries or other source material such as works of art or architecture.

If the focus of the extended essay is linguistic, it is essential for the student to demonstrate an understanding of the grammatical structure of the language and show how, for example, authors exploit its features.

If the focus of the extended essay is on literature, the student should show an awareness of a work read, at least partly, in the original Greek or Latin. The extended essay should reveal an understanding of the ways in which the author exploits the language to create particular effects.

If the focus of the extended essay is on the ancient civilization concerned, it should show clear evidence of substantial background reading and an awareness of the major historical and cultural features at work in this setting. Links between the language, literature and culture should be identified and scrutinized.

The historical context of the extended essay should be established by means of appropriate references to literature, art and archeological sources.

Interpreting the assessment criteria

Criterion A: research question

The research question must be appropriate to the particular subject in which the essay is registered. In classical Greek and Latin, this means that it must focus on an aspect, usually a controversial one, of the ancient Greek or Roman world. The research question must be clearly and precisely focused, and stated in both the abstract and introduction of the essay.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction should explain succinctly the significance and context of the topic, why it is worthy of investigation and, where appropriate, how the research question relates to existing knowledge. It should not be used to present lengthy, irrelevant background material.

Criterion C: investigation

A well-planned investigation will consider carefully the range of resources available that are relevant to the topic. Students should aim to make use of both primary and secondary sources where possible. The data gathered should be the evidence found in the sources to establish the context and to support the argument and conclusion of the essay. All material used from sources must be acknowledged in references. If students make use of Internet-based sources, they should do so critically and circumspectly in full awareness of their potential unreliability.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

This criterion demands that the essay has a solid foundation of specific relevant knowledge, whose meaning is understood by the student. This knowledge can then be analysed, and, on the basis of this analysis, an argument can be formed and a conclusion to the research question reached.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Students should be aware of the need to give their essays the backbone of a developing argument. Personal views should not simply be stated but need to be supported by reasoned argument based on specific details, to persuade the reader of their validity. Straightforward descriptive or narrative accounts that lack analysis do not usually advance an argument and should be avoided.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Students should analyse (that is, consider the meaning and importance of) the relevant material discovered in their investigation to argue a case and reach a conclusion. Sources used in the research process, whether by classical authors or modern commentators, should be carefully evaluated and their reliability assessed.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Students are expected to be familiar with the vocabulary of classical studies and should provide definitions of key terms. The language of the essay must be clear and unambiguous, and statements should be specific and precise, avoiding sweeping generalizations and unsupported assertions. However, provided that their meaning is clear, students who are not writing in their first language will not be disadvantaged.

Criterion H: conclusion

“Consistent” is the key word here: the conclusion should develop out of the argument and not introduce new or extraneous content. It should not repeat the material of the introduction; rather, it should present a new synthesis in light of the discussion.

Criterion I: formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract must consist of three elements: the research question (or hypothesis), the scope of the essay (that is, what was investigated and how it was investigated) and the conclusion. An abstract is not a precis of the topic.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Qualities that are rewarded under this criterion include the following.

- Intellectual initiative: Ways of demonstrating this in classical Greek and Latin essays include the choice of topic and research question, and new approaches to popular topics (possibly achieved through evaluating different historical explanations).
- Insight and depth of understanding: These are most likely to be demonstrated as a consequence of detailed research, reflection that is thorough and well informed, and reasoned argument that consistently and effectively addresses the research question.